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ABSTRACT

This report focuses on linguistically and culturally diverse students who enter the formal education process from homes and communities in which English is not the primary language. These students experience unrealized academic success. Data are presented on Hispanic students as an example, showing a 40% non-graduation rate, a 35% grade retention rate, a two to four grade level achievement gap, and a school segregation occurrence of 70%. California data are used to illustrate the anticipated rise in culturally-diverse school-age students over the next four decades; by 2030, 70% are expected to be non-Anglo. Recent research is reviewed on effective instructional practices, including high levels of communication, integrated and thematic curriculum, collaborative learning, language and literacy, and perceptions. It is concluded that linguistically and culturally diverse students can be served effectively, that they can achieve academically at levels at or above national norms, and that instructional strategies that work best acknowledge, respect, and build upon the language and culture of the home. Teachers are the key players and native language instruction is key in the early grades. Brief suggestions are offered. Contains 10 references. (LB)

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EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE REPORT: 1

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EDUCATION OF LINGUISTICALLY AND CULTURALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS: EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

EUGENE GARCIA

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The Education of Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students: Effective Instructional Practices

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The Education of Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students: Effective Instructional Practices

Overview

Linguistically and culturally diverse students find themselves in a vulnerable situation on entering U.S. schools. They can achieve academic success, however, when provided with appropriate instruction tailored to meet their specific needs. Recent research has documented effective instructional practices used with students from homes and communities where English is not the primary language of communication. These descriptive studies identified specific schools and classrooms whose language minority students were particularly successful academically. Studies included examination of preschool, elementary, and high school classrooms, and concentrated largely on Latino students.

A number of common attributes were identified in the instructional organization of the classrooms studied:

- functional communication between teacher and students and among fellow students was emphasized;
- the instruction of basic skills and academic content was consistently organized around thematic units;
- instruction was organized in such a way that students were required to interact with each other utilizing collaborative learning techniques;
- students progressed systematically from writing in the native language to writing in English, making the transition without any pressure from the teacher to do so;
- teachers were highly committed to the educational success of their students and served as student advocates;
- principals were highly supportive of their instructional staff and supported teacher autonomy while maintaining an awareness of the need to conform to district policies on curriculum and academic accountability;
- both Anglo and non-Anglo parents were involved in the formal parent support activities of the schools and expressed a high level of satisfaction with and appreciation for their children's educational experience in these schools.

Introduction

The United States continues in a trend of ethnic and racial population diversification, a fact that is particularly evident among young and school-age children. Moreover, the next generation of ethnic and racial minority children continues to be placed "at risk" in today's social institutions. State and national reports regarding the academic achievement, economic condition, and future employment prospects of our culturally and linguistically diverse children indicate significant academic underachievement, high poverty rates, high teen pregnancy rates, and low-skill, low-paying employment opportunities. The future lies in understanding how a diverse population, in such a situation of risk and vulnerability, can achieve social, educational, and employment competence. Our vulnerable populations must succeed. In them reside the new ideas, energy, and resources for our society's future.

Linguistically and culturally diverse children in the United States have, in fact, always found themselves in a vulnerable situation. "Linguistically and culturally diverse" is a relatively new educational term, however, which expresses little appreciation for the diversity among the many populations it encompasses. Educational leaders, such as former Secretary of Education Lauro Cavazos, have concluded that populations identified as linguistically and culturally diverse have been perceived by the majority society as linguistically, cognitively, socially, and educationally vulnerable because of their non-mainstream culture and their lack of English proficiency at the critical age for schooling (Cavazos, 1990). This perception has led to a variety of social and educational programs aimed at ridding this population of those characteristics that put them at risk (Barona & Garcia, 1990).

In this paper, we will look specifically at linguistically and culturally diverse students who enter the formal education process from homes and communities in which English is not the primary language of communication. These students display a portrait of unrealized academic success. Table 1 (on pages 10-11) summarizes present statistical data relevant to the largest population in this broad category: Hispanic students. The table attempts to define this population more clearly by focusing on general demographic indicators as well as on specific educational characteristics and specific social indices that mark this population as particularly vulnerable in U.S. institutions. With regard to the educational situation, the picture painted by these statistics is deplorable, including a 40% non-graduation rate, a 35% grade retention rate, a 2-4 grade-level achievement gap, and a school segregation circumstance of 70%, up from 56% in the 1950's. Figure 1 (on page 9) presents more relevant California schooling information. These

data delineate quite dramatically the anticipated rise in the number of culturally diverse school-age students over the next four decades. In 1986, less than 50% of California's school-age population was non-Anglo. That percentage is expected to increase to 60% by the year 2000, and to a high of 70% by 2030.

Recent research has redefined the nature of our linguistically and culturally diverse students' educational vulnerability. It has destroyed stereotypes and myths and laid a foundation upon which to reconceptualize present educational practices and launch new initiatives. This foundation recognizes both the homogeneity and the heterogeneity within and among linguistically and culturally diverse populations. No one set of descriptions or prescriptions will suffice. However, it is useful to give particular attention to features shared by members of these populations, including their bilingual/bicultural character and certain aspects of their instructional circumstances. The following discussion provides a brief overview of recent research addressing effective instruction for these students, with particular emphasis on instructional strategies and staffing characteristics.

Effective Instructional Practices

The present synopsis and analysis rest on the foundations established by recent research documenting educationally effective practices used with linguistically and culturally diverse students in selected sites throughout the United States: Carpenteria, CA (Cummins, 1986); San Diego, CA (Carter & Chatfield, 1986); Phoenix, AZ (Garcia, 1988; Moll, 1988); and the San Francisco Bay Area (Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 1990; Pease-Alvarez, García, & Espinosa, in press). These descriptive studies identified specific schools and classrooms whose Latino, American Indian, Asian, and Southeast Asian language minority students were particularly successful academically, with academic achievement measured at or above the national norms. It is important to note that much of these data have concentrated on Latino students. The case study approach adopted by these studies included examination of pre-school, elementary, and high school classrooms. Teachers, principals, parents, and students were interviewed and specific classroom observations were conducted to assess the dynamics of the instructional process. The results of these studies provide important insights with regard to general instructional organization, literacy development, academic achievement, and the perspectives of students, teachers, administrators, and parents.

High Levels of Communication

A large number of common attributes were identified in the instructional organization of the classrooms studied. Functional communication between teacher and students and among fellow students was emphasized more than might be expected in a regular classroom. Teachers were constantly checking with students to verify the clarity of assignments and the students' roles in those assignments. Classrooms were characterized by a high, sometimes even noisy, level of communication emphasizing student collaboration on small group projects organized around "learning centers." This organization minimized individualized work tasks, such as worksheet exercises, and provided a very informal family-like social setting in which the teacher either worked with a small group of students— never larger than eight and as small as one—or traveled about the room assisting individuals or small groups of students as they worked on their projects. Large group instruction was rare, usually confined to start-up activities in the morning.

Integrated and Thematic Curriculum

Significantly, the instruction of basic skills and academic content was consistently organized around thematic units. In the majority of classrooms studied, the students actually selected the themes in consultation with the teacher, either through direct voting or through some related negotiation process. The teacher's responsibility was to insure that the instruction revolving around the chosen themes covered the school district's content- and skill-related goals and objectives for that grade level. The theme approach allowed teachers to integrate academic content with the development of basic skills. The major thrust in these classrooms was the appropriation of knowledge centered around chosen themes, with the understanding that students would necessarily develop basic skills as a means to appropriate this knowledge. Students became "experts" in thematic domains while also acquiring the requisite academic skills.

In one third grade classroom, the teacher asked students early in the year, "What do you want to learn about?" Besides the usual responses from the students regarding their desire to learn to "read," "do math," "write," etc., one student indicated that he wanted "to learn about the chemicals that my father has that are making my little brother sick"—pesticides. The teacher, with the assistance of the students, determined what the students already knew about pesticides, made a list of questions to which the students hoped to find answers, and developed a set of specific learning goals. Over the next five weeks, the classroom organized reading, writing, research, science, math, and social studies assignments that addressed these learning goals in an integrated fashion. The teacher guided students through a variety of learning activities while making sure that students

developed and utilized district-articulated grade-level skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and social studies. Students developed those skills while acquiring knowledge in a challenging and highly relevant domain.

Collaborative Learning

Reported micro-analysis of instructional events in literacy and math, along with analysis of actual literacy products (dialogue journals, learning logs, writing workshop publications, etc.) and math products (learning logs, homework, surveys, etc.), indicated that teachers in Latino language minority classrooms organized instruction in such a way that students were required to interact with each other utilizing collaborative learning techniques. It was during student-student interactions that most higher order cognitive and linguistic discourse was observed (García, 1988). Students asked each other hard questions and challenged each other's answers more readily than they did in interactions with the teacher. Moreover, students were likely to seek assistance from other students and were successful in obtaining it.

Language and Literacy

Another feature noted in the classrooms studied was language of instruction. In classes with Spanish speakers, lower-grade teachers used both Spanish and English, whereas upper grade teachers utilized mostly English. However, students were allowed to use either language.

With regard to the literacy development of Spanish-speaking students, observations revealed the following:

(a) students progressed systematically from writing in the native language in the early grades to writing in English in the later grades;

(b) students' writing in English emerged at or above their grade level of writing in Spanish;

(c) students' writing in English was highly conventional, contained few spelling or grammatical errors, and showed systematic use of invented spelling; and

(d) students made the transition from Spanish to English themselves, without any pressure from the teacher to do so.

Unfortunately, limited research with non-Latino students with regard to this form of micro-analysis is available.

Perceptions

Interviews with classroom teachers, principals, and parents from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds revealed an interesting set of perspectives regarding the education of students in the schools studied.

Classroom teachers were highly committed to the educational success of their students; perceived themselves as instructional innovators utilizing new learning theories and instructional philosophies to guide their practice; continued to be involved in professional development activities, including participation in small-group support networks; had a strong, demonstrated commitment to school-home communication (several teachers utilized a weekly parent interaction format); and felt that they had the autonomy to create or change the instruction and curriculum in their classrooms, even if they did not follow the district's guidelines to the letter. These instructors "adopted" their students: They had high academic expectations for all of them ("Everyone will learn to read in my classroom") and they served as advocates for their students. They rejected any suggestion that their students were intellectually or academically disadvantaged.

Principals tended to be well informed and highly articulate about the curriculum and instructional strategies undertaken in their schools. They were also highly supportive of their instructional staff, taking pride in their accomplishments. They reported their support of teacher autonomy, although they were quite aware of the pressure to conform strictly to district policies regarding the standardization of curriculum and the need for academic accountability (testing).

Parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with and appreciation for their children's educational experience in these schools. All indicated or implied that their children's academic success was vital to the children's future economic success. Both Anglo and non-Anglo parents were quite involved in the formal parent support activities of the schools. However, Anglo parents' attitudes were somewhat distrustful of the schools' specific interest in doing what was best for their child. Conversely, non-Anglo parents expressed a high level of trust for the teaching and administrative staff.

Conclusions

The research described above addressed some significant practice questions about effective academic environments for linguistically and culturally diverse students:

(1) *Did native language instruction play a role?*

The schools in these studies considered native language instruction key in the early grades (K-3).

(2) *Was there one best curriculum?*

No common curriculum was identified in these studies. However, a well-trained instructional staff implementing an integrated student-centered

curriculum, with literacy pervasive in all aspects of instruction, was consistently observed across grade levels. Basals were utilized sparingly and usually as resource material.

(3) *What instructional strategies were effective?*

Teachers consistently organized instruction so as to insure heterogeneous small-group collaborative academic activities requiring a high degree of student-to-student interaction. Individual instructional activity was limited, as was individual competition as a classroom motivational ingredient.

(4) *Who were the key players in this effective schooling drama?*

School administrators and parents played important roles, but teachers were the key players. They gained the confidence of their peers and supervisors. They worked to organize instruction, create new instructional environments, assess instructional effectiveness, and advocate for their students. They were proud of their students—academically reassuring but consistently demanding. They rejected any notion of academic, linguistic, cultural, or intellectual inferiority in their students.

These features of effective classrooms for linguistically and culturally diverse students contribute, above all, to the establishment of an interactive, student-centered learning context. In other words, effective instructional staff recognize that academic learning has its roots in processes of social interaction. This type of instruction provides abundant and diverse opportunities for speaking, listening, reading, and writing along with native language scaffolding to help guide students through the learning process. A focus on social interaction encourages students to take risks, construct meaning, and seek reinterpretations of knowledge within compatible social contexts. Within this knowledge-driven curriculum, skills are tools for acquiring knowledge, not a fundamental target of teaching events (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Garcia, 1988).

Implications

The above set of descriptive data can be perceived of as providing a new set of understandings regarding the effective academic instruction of linguistically and culturally diverse students. The practices identified here as effective have also been affirmed by recent educational intervention research aimed at restructuring education for these students (Rivera & Zehler, 1990). The convergence of findings from this new empirical research, including those described here, generates the following set of specific guides:

- Any curriculum, including one for diverse children, must address all categories of learning goals (cognitive and academic, advanced as well as basic). We should not lower our expectations for these students; they, too, need to be intellectually challenged.

- The more linguistically and culturally diverse the children we teach, the more closely we must relate academic content to the child's own environment and experience.

- The more diverse the children, the more integrated the curriculum should be. That is, multiple content areas (e.g., math, science, social studies) and language learning activities should be centered around a single theme. Children should have opportunities to study a topic in depth, and to apply a variety of skills acquired in home, community, and school contexts.

- The more diverse the children, the greater the need for active rather than passive endeavors, particularly informal social activities such as group projects, in which students are allowed flexibility in their participation with the teacher and other students.

- The more diverse the children, the more important it is to offer them opportunities to apply what they are learning in a meaningful context. Curriculum can be made meaningful in a number of creative ways. Science and math skills can be effectively applied, for example, through hands-on, interactive activities that allow students to explore issues of significance in their lives, such as an investigation of the quality of the local water supply.

In conclusion, information derived from recent research indicates that linguistically and culturally diverse students can be served effectively. These students can achieve academically at levels at or above the national norm. The instructional stategies that serve these students well acknowledge, respect, and build upon the language and culture of the home. Students become important partners with teachers and parents in the teaching/learning enterprise. Teachers play the most critical role in students' academic success. Although much more research is required with the great diverse populations of students served by our schools, we are not without a knowledge base that can make a difference.

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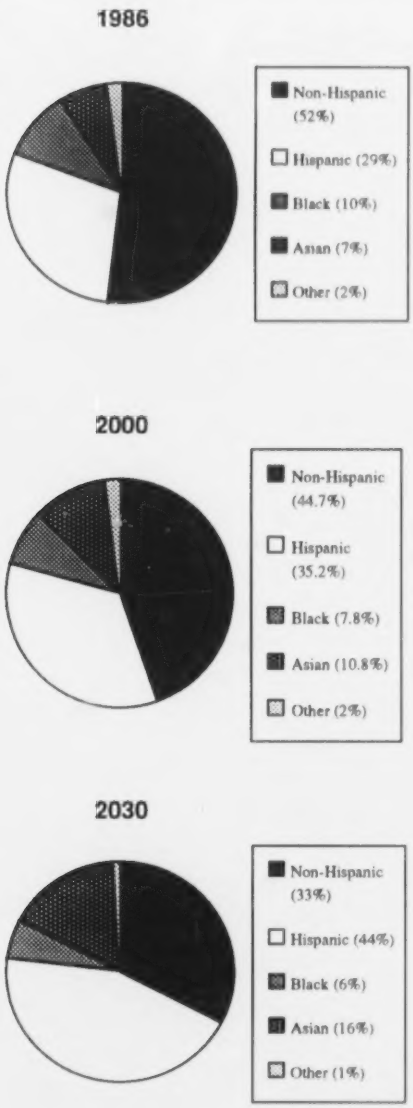
FIGURE 1

CALIFORNIA'S SCHOOL AGE POPULATION BY RACE/ETHNICITY



Source:

Olsen, L. (1988). *Crossing the schoolhouse border: Immigrant students and the California public schools.* San Francisco: California Tomorrow.

TABLE 1

HISPANIC DEMOGRAPHIC SYNTHESIS

I. General Demographic Character

A. Of the 18.8 million Hispanics in the continental United States, the following characterizes the population's ethnic diversity:

Country/Area of Origin	*Number*	*Percent*
Mexico	11.8 million	62.8
Puerto Rico	2.3 million	12.2
Central/South America	2.1 million	11.2
Cuba	1.0 million	5.3
Other	1.6 million	8.5

B. 82% of this Hispanic population is found in eight states: California (31%), Texas (20%), New York (11%), Florida (6%), Illinois (4%), Arizona (3%), Colorado (3%), New Mexico (3%).

C. Average age of this population is 25.1 years (compared to 32.6 years for the general United States population).

D. 200,000 Hispanics immigrate legally to the United States yearly, which represents 40% of all legal immigrants. An estimated 200,000 Hispanics immigrate illegally each year.

E. The U.S. Hispanic population grew by 61% from 1970 to 1980 compared to an 11% growth in the general population.

F. 11 million Hispanics report speaking Spanish in the home.

G. 7% of U.S. Hispanics live in metropolitan areas; 50% in central cities.

II. Education

A. 40% of Hispanics leave school prior to high school graduation (40% of those leaving do so by grade 10).

B. 35% of Hispanics are held back at least one grade.

C. 47% of Hispanics are over-aged at grade 12.

D. 85% of Hispanic students are in urban school districts.

E. 70% of Hispanic students attend segregated schools (up 56% from 1956).

F. Hispanics score significantly below national norms on academic achievement tests of reading, math, science, social science, and writing at grades 3, 7, and 11, generally averaging 1-2 grade levels below the norm. At grade 11, Hispanics average a grade 8 achievement level on these tests.

III. Indices of Vulnerability

A. Median family income has fluctuated for Hispanics (1972—$18,880; 1982—$16,227; 1986—$19,995), remaining below that of non-Hispanics (1972—$26,261; 1982—$23,907; 1986—$30,321).

B. 29% of Hispanic families live below the poverty line, up from 21% in 1979. (10.2% of Anglo families live below the poverty line.)

C. 905,000 (23%) Hispanic families are maintained by female head-of-household (up from 17% in 1970). 53% of these households live below the poverty line.

D. 50% of Hispanic women are in the labor force.

E. Hispanics are twice as likely as Anglos to be born to unmarried, teen mothers.

F. 56% of Hispanics are functionally illiterate, compared to 46% of Blacks and 16% of Whites.

G. 65% of Hispanics hold unskilled and semiskilled jobs compared to 35% of non-Hispanics.

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